

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in New York City
February 2, 1999

Thank you very much. If I may, with all respect to Caroline, borrow a line from President Kennedy, it looks to me like that it is highly likely that I will increasingly be known as the person who comes with Hillary to New York. *[Laughter]*

I want to, first of all, say to all of you how grateful I am to Steve Grossman for the great work he has done as our chairman. Nobody wanted to be head of the Democratic Party when it was \$18 million in debt—*[laughter]*—but Steve Grossman, he thought it was just a minor irritant that we could do away with. And I said today—you know, Hillary came to New York today, and I went to Boston, and I'll tell you more about that in a minute. I had a great day in Boston.

She said, "Now, tell me again what you're doing in Boston." I said, "Well, I'm going to go up to Boston, and we're going to canonize Steve Grossman." And she said, "Bill, don't say that. It's the wrong religion." *[Laughter]* So I did it anyway. I introduced him to his hometown crowd today as the first person of the Jewish faith ever to be called Saint Steven. *[Laughter]* And they liked it in Boston. *[Laughter]* At least the Irish and the Italians liked it, which is a big part of the crowd. *[Laughter]*

We had a great day. I want to thank Len Barrack for the work he's done. And Governor Romer, all the staff folks. I want to thank Joe Andrew and Beth Dozoretz for being willing to serve. I want to thank Judith Hope for doing a great job here in New York. And I cannot tell you how grateful I am to Jerry Nadler, Carolyn Maloney and Nita Lowey. They are treasures. They do a magnificent job for New York, but they stand up for what's right for America, and you should be so proud that our party is represented by people like them in the United States Congress.

I want to thank Congressman Klein and Speaker Silver and all my pals from Indiana who are here tonight. *[Laughter]* Joe Andrew, this is a good sign. You're going to spoil us, you know, when we go to Washington State, I'm going to be looking for the five

people from Indiana. *[Laughter]* When we're in South Texas, I'll be looking for the five people from Indiana. *[Laughter]* We're going to open every meeting with "Back Home in Indiana." *[Laughter]* We'll all sing it.

You know, I could tell when Hillary was talking to you about the women with whom she met today that it touched you. But you have to know that I think that politics only works if you have certain principles and values, you have ideas about how to implement them, and then you have some sense of what the human impact of what you do is. I mean, if this doesn't make any difference to anybody's life, why did you come out here tonight? You could have eaten downstairs for less money—*[laughter]*—which, with all respect to the owner at this restaurant, is saying something. *[Laughter]* And you could have done that.

So I'm getting ready for my next life. I'm going to be the comic that closes the show—*[laughter]*—my stand up life. I just want to tell you two stories, too, that really mean a lot to me. The other day—well, let me back up and say I believe there are two things which distinguish the two parties today on almost every issue of major significance. There may be 200, but I think there are two, for sure.

First is, what is the role of Government in making the America of our dreams in the 21st century? The first thing is, we ended the old debate that nearly wrecked this country and quadrupled the national debt and got us in a terrible hole in the 1980's, where, you know, the argument was always: Is Government the solution, or is Government the problem? And my argument was always that Government is neither, that the role of Government is to create the conditions and get people the tools to make the most of their own lives.

The second and, I think, fundamentally even more important difference is our idea of community. Our idea of community goes way beyond just saying you believe in the same things. I think most of us, in the very fiber of our being, believe that we are all interconnected, that we are an interdependent people in an increasingly interdependent world, that when you strip away all the layers, nobody is any better than anybody else, and

that we cannot find personal or family or business—economic—fulfillment without some decent concern for the ability of others to find the same. I believe that.

And I was raised with those values and had a fresh reminder involving New York City the other day, from a strange source. I have a 60-year-old cousin who runs the local HUD office, the housing project, in the little town in Arkansas where I was born. And the other day she called the White House, and we've been friends. She was the best rodeo performer in Arkansas when she was 16 years old. [Laughter] I used to watch her barrel race and rope cows and—I mean, the calves and all that stuff. She was fabulous. And she still looks like she could do it after all these years.

But she called and said she was coming to Washington for a HUD conference and wanted to spend the night, and she spent the night. And I got up, and we had breakfast in the morning. She still gets up real early like I used to do when I lived there. And so we were talking and she said, "I'm really worried about something." And I said, "What is it?" She said, "Well, you know, I come from about the smallest place represented at this conference." She said, "Most of these people are from New York or Los Angeles or someplace like that." And she said, "They tell me there are 20,000 to 30,000 children a year in foster care that turn 18 and are just turned out. Their parents don't get any more money, and some of them are foster parents who can't afford to take care of them. And a lot of these kids are just on the street when they ought to be going to college." So I said, "Well, I think we're trying to do something about that, and I'll get back to you."

Four days later, Hillary did an event about part of our budget that she has been crusading for for years, to provide funds to places like New York City to support those children, to give them a decent place to live, to give them a chance at going to college, to give them a chance to go on with their lives. Twenty thousand to 30,000 people in a country of 260 million is not all that many. But if it's your life, it's the biggest number in the world. And I thought to myself, my cousin, raised by the people on my mama's side of the family who had all the same values,

was really worried about those kids in New York City, and I was very proud to be related to her. And I am proud to be related to all of you because I think we care about that, and I think it illustrates what our party stands for.

Now, today I went up—while Hillary was having a good time in New York, I was in Boston—[laughter]—having a good time at the Mann Jackson Elementary School. It's a great school, and I won't bore you with all the details, but they had the choir singing for me. And then I met with the choir afterward, and a bunch of the students and, gosh, there were Irish kids and Italian kids and Jewish kids, and there were Arab-American kids, and there were Hispanic kids from a bunch of different countries, and there were Chinese kids, Japanese kids, Thai kids, kids from the Indian subcontinent, both Indians and Pakistanis. They were all there. And it was amazing. And I thought, you know, this is this bewildering kaleidoscope that is America.

So they're going to ask me all these questions, right? And they're all going to be very ethnically distinguishable. "What's your favorite food?" [Laughter] Chinese-American kid says, "Why do you live in such a big house? You've got more room than you need." [Laughter] And I said, "Well, it's not really my house. It's sort of a museum, and I live in a few rooms." And I said, "Well, why don't you just come down and see it?" "Do you like your job?" I said, "Now, I have to be honest." [Laughter] And I told them the truth. I said, "Every day! Even the bad days—every day."

Then there was this incredibly touching child who was quite large for his age, 9-year-old child, who was blind, who was either Indian or Pakistani; he didn't tell me, and we didn't have time to talk. And he came up and he says, "I've got a song I learned, and I want to sing this song"—barged up to the front of the line. And I said, "Well, just sing ahead." And it was an environmental song about not polluting. And the point I want to make to you is that what these children had that was different about them is part of what makes America interesting and will make us a more interesting country in the

future. But what they had in common was self-evident and profound.

And that's the other thing that means a lot to me. So I am very glad that I had the chance to serve as President. I'm very glad that we got a chance to put the ideas that I brought to the country in 1991 and 1992 into effect. I'm glad I had incredibly gifted people like the Vice President and Hillary and so many other people on our team to make it work, not the least of whom, as all of you know, is my great Secretary of the Treasury from New York, Bob Rubin.

But what matters to me is the lives that changed. You know, if you say, "Well, we've got the lowest peacetime unemployment rate since 1957," that's an applause line. But the real applause line is what it does to the lives of the people. You say, "We've cut the welfare rolls nearly in half." How did it change people's lives? If we have the lowest crime rate in 30 years, what difference does that make? That means a whole lot of people are walking around who wouldn't be even walking around otherwise. These are the stories, the songs of life, the texture of America.

And I would like to say, in much briefer and more, sort of, impressionistic language, the point I tried to make at the State of the Union, which is: Yes, I'm very glad for the economic record that has been amassed. And I'm glad that most of you have done very well in this economy and can do this and still send your kids to college—be here tonight. *[Laughter]* But what I would like to say is, I believe that we shouldn't be celebrating; we should be thanking the good Lord that we have this opportunity.

I mean, I think about past Presidents, past Members of Congress, past Governors, past you-name-it, people who had public responsibilities, who would have killed to have the circumstances that we have now, to have the freedom to face the long-term challenges of America.

And I believe that, as a political party, we have a solemn responsibility to go out and tell the American people, "Look, if you want to give us a pat on the back for being right in 1993 and bringing the deficit down, getting the interest rates down and for being right about family leave and right about the Brady bill and right about the crime bill,

that's fine. We'd be honored to have it. But what we want you to do is to think about what, as a country, we can do with these times and this prosperity. What our responsibilities are. How many new good stories we can create out there."

And this country—even though we're doing very well, we have huge challenges. And I just—the aging of America; the children of America, who are poorer than the seniors; the continuing challenge to reconcile work and family; the difficulty of maintaining our own economic expansion when there are places in America and in this city that have not felt any of the economic recovery; and when there is such instability and uncertainty around the world about the global financial system and the global trading system, where more and more ordinary citizens, not in this country even as much as other countries, have real questions about whether they will be personally benefitted if we continue to expand trade, and when we know it's the only way to keep economic growth going: These are huge questions. How can we continue to grow the economy and seriously manage the problem of global warming? A lot of people don't think about that. I have to tell you that I am—Al Gore was showing me those carbon charts 5 or 6 years ago, but for the last 24 months, it's been my cause, too. I am sold. I am convinced this is a huge deal. And the good news is that it is obvious that the technology is there to deal with this issue and continue to grow the economy, probably at a more rapid rate, and not only for us but for countries like China and India and Pakistan and Argentina and other developing countries as well.

Now, these are huge things. So what I was trying to say in the State of the Union is, we, as Americans, have a special responsibility from which it would be easy to walk away, because we're doing fine. But it's a very dynamic world, and the women that Hillary talked to today and the kids that I spoke with today, they deserve better. They deserve better. And so do you, and so do your children and your grandchildren.

We may never have another opportunity to prove that we can find ways to put billions and billions of dollars of private capital into inner city and rural neighborhoods that

haven't had any new investment in this recovery and in the process keep our own economy going.

We will never have a better time to deal with Social Security and Medicare by setting aside the lion's share of this surplus to do so or to provide for all Americans to have the opportunity to save, to invest, to create a share of wealth, something most Americans can't afford to do, even with the enormous improvement in the stock market.

And this is also for our children. I said yesterday—I want to say again, if we buy in the privately held debt and obligate the repayment of the bonds to the Social Security Trust Fund and to Medicare, we will reduce publically—debt held by the private citizens to the lowest percentage of our economy since 1917, before World War I. In 15 years—today, when your Members of Congress vote on the budget, they'll have to set aside over 13 cents of every dollar you pay in taxes to pay interest on the debt. In 15 years, that Congress will only set aside 2 cents on the dollar, if we do this.

Can you imagine what our successors will be able to do with 11 percent of your tax money? If we have a slowdown in the economy, they'll be able to afford a tax cut. If we have a crisis in education, they'll be able to deal with it. If we need to dramatically increase our investment in medical research or if we have some new security threat, they'll have the money to invest in it and we'll still be strong. And I could go on and on and on. That's what this is all about, and it will change the stories. It will change the future of the country. So I ask you to keep your energy level high, to keep your sights high, to realize that rarely do a whole people get a chance to help make the world their children and grandchildren will live in and to make it a better place. And in the process, recognizing humbly that we cannot begin to foresee everything that they will face, we will at least be giving them the tools with which to face the challenges we do not know.

That is our obligation. It is perhaps fortuitous, perhaps fated, that it occurs at the end of this century and the end of this millennium. But Hillary's theme for this occasion, "Honoring the past and imaging the future," both require us to take these steps. That's

what your presence here will enable us to do.

So I ask you to leave here with confidence, I ask you to know that the President and the First Lady feel a gratitude to the people of New York, the city and the State, that is inexpressible. But the only way we know how to express that gratitude is to seize this moment, and I want you to help us do it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:40 p.m. at the Le Cirque Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg; Steve Grossman, national chair; Leonard Barrack, national finance chair; Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair-designate; and Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair-designate; Democratic National Committee; New York State Democratic Chair Judith Hope; former Congressman Herb Klein; Sheldon Silver, speaker, New York State Assembly; Myra J. Irvin, manager, section 8 rental assistance program, Hope, Arkansas Housing Authority; and elementary school student Gerald Mejia.

Remarks to the American Association of Retired Persons National Legislative Council

February 3, 1999

Thank you, and good morning. Thank you, Mr. Perkins—or, good afternoon. Don't tell anybody. [*Laughter*] Don't tell anybody I didn't know what time it was. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Mr. Perkins, for your memory of that—I did say that, about counting. Mr. McManus, Tess Canja, Margaret Dixon, John Rother, and Horace Deets: thank you especially for representing the AARP so well in dealing with the White House over the last 6 years.

I was glad to be invited to come over here today. You know, it's rare that a President gets to speak to an organization of which he's a member. [*Laughter*] And as I said repeatedly a couple years ago, I had mixed feelings about that, when you called my attention to the fact that I was aging. [*Laughter*] But I don't have mixed feelings about the record the AARP has established for 40 years, calling attention to the challenges of aging to all Americans.